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ABSTRACT

Factors influencing school performance of alienated minority youth are examined, preventive approaches discussed, and results of a survey of 165 preservice and inservice teachers and other educational personnel regarding student alienation are presented. Contributing factors to adjustment problems are traced to environmental influences, psychological patterns, intellectual characteristics, and school problems (such as suspension, truancy, and disruptive behavior). Seven prevention oriented projects are highlighted. Results of the teacher opinion survey suggested the importance of early identification and prevention. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated that unmet educational and social needs were the reasons for student alienation. (CL)

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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEMS OF ALIENATED YOUTH

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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEMS OF ALIENATED YOUTH

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OVERVIEW

Rationale

Attention to the problems of minority alienated youth is rapidly becoming one of the high priorities in the education of children with special needs. The objective is to establish an effective human service delivery capacity to facilitate the normalization and reintegration processes for these alienated adolescents.

Current policy regarding education of alienated youth focuses on providing instructional objectives to effect maximal reintegration of youthful offenders alienated further by low level skills back into the overall school programs and eventually to appropriate community placement.

Providing for the youth who cannot profit from regular public school class instruction without some special assistance is one of the educational problems school systems must face today. Because of the multiplicity of factors, many youth are unable to respond to the demands of the school without specialized help. These youth require stimulating and motivating experiences. Thus, it is imperative that teachers acquire understandings, attitudes, and special techniques to enable them to more adequately direct the learning experiences of youth who will return to the regular classroom.

There is an increasing awareness of the problems but there exists a paucity of trained personnel and adequate facilities to alleviate the concomitant learning and behavior problems.

This report will present the results of a survey as well as useful information for gaining an understanding of the multiplicity of ways of dealing with recurring problems. Teachers and other professionals in transitional settings need considerable skill, judgement and sensitivity, as well as familiarity with the learning and behavior patterns of these incarcerated youth.

Definitions

Alienated youth are described as those individuals who have been rejected by society, or caused to be set apart as a group. Hendricks and Jones (1972) note that the parameters of student alienation are somewhat difficult to define but identify alienated youth as adolescents who rebel against institutional authority and reject the traditional values of society.

A literal meaning of the term alienation was suggested by Johnson (1980) as "not belonging." In describing alienation he concludes that this condition is far more debilitating than serious emotional disturbance.

Pacheco (1978) explains the conditions of alienation as "a distorted existence where one is alienated from the products of the productive process, from the productive activitity itself, from oneself as a human being and from other human beings."

Transitional settings are described as youth development centers, training schools, detention homes, juvenile centers, community based alternative programs, in-school suspensions, alternative schools and other short term facilities.

Problems of Adjustment

The major premise of this paper is that membership in certain cultural and racial minority groups produces deficits within the individuals which predisposes them to develop asocial behavior patterns. Support for this premise is derived from data revealing the high incidence of alienated youth who are products of social and cultural deprivation.

During the formative years, many of these youth may have had high ambitions but because of low income and lack of opportunity turned to delinquency as a means of achieving self esteem. The etiological sources of problem behavior may be associated with the conflict between the realities of family life and the expectations of the school and society.

Coleman (1978) calls attention to the decreasing adequacy of the environment in which young people are growing up. He contends that the qualitative change in the social - psychological environment provided by many families indicates that schools must begin to assume a broader set of responsibilities than they have in the past.

Contributing Factors

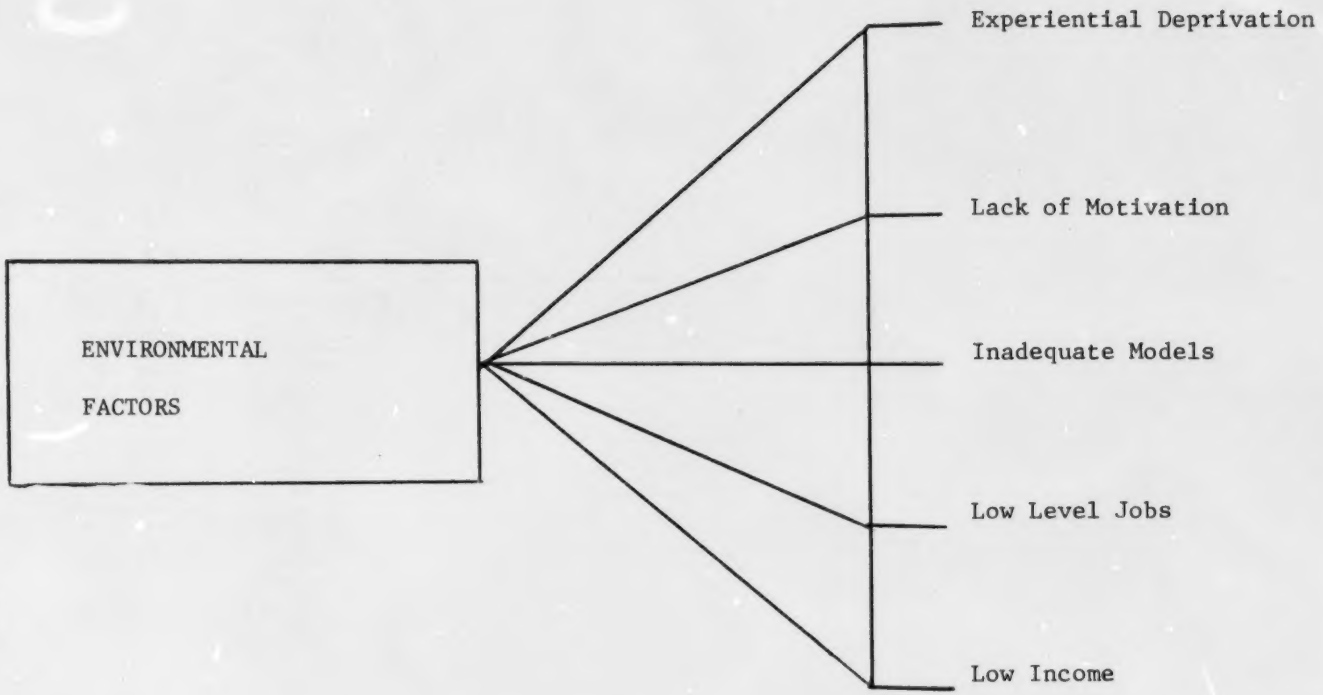
An examination of published information revealed a composite of four factors to be considered in addressing the problems of alienated youth. These are environmental factors, psychological patterns, intellectual characteristics and school problems.

Environmental Factors. There appears to be a strong link between environmental factors and the incidence of alienation and disruptive behavior. The cause-and-effect relationship may be traced to experiential deprivation, lack of motivation, inadequate role models, low level jobs, and low income. (See Figure 1)

Johnson contends that because alienated youth have generally lived and have been socialized in environments of total mistrust, they are unable to develop feelings or relationships based on mutual trust.

Effective acceptance of authority should be one of the major goals of a training program for youth in transitional settings. Some helpful suggestions include raising the level of self concept and sense of worthiness through praise, positive experiences and interpersonal relationships. The relationship of students to authority figures is a key component in the teaching learning process.

FIGURE 1 ALIENATED MINORITY YOUTH OFFENDERS IN TRANSITIONAL SETTINGS



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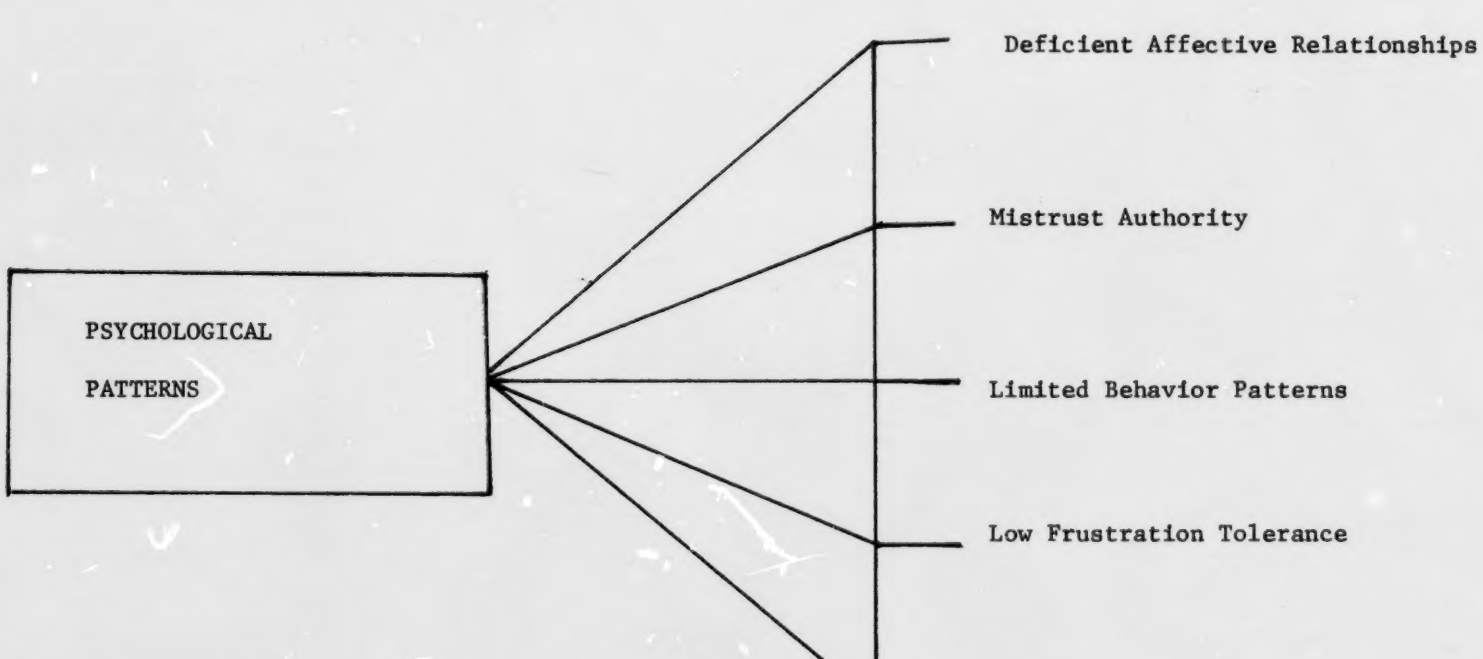
Strom (1966) notes that studies have consistently revealed a high incidence of school failure among adolescents from low-income families. He explains that the familial tendencies inducing conditions that foster school drop out may be attributed to the so-called culture of poverty in which one finds a high proportion of disrupted and broken homes where the father is often absent. The usual result is an emotional distance which dilutes affective responses and a cumulative deficit in acquiring and developing language skills.

In discussing minority children who were reared in a poverty situation Cardenas and Zamora (1980) contend that these children follow a non-typical developmental pattern. The limited interaction between adults and children, the absence of success models and an academically oriented tradition compound the problems. Thus, "the incompatibility between the existing level of development and the level of development assumed in the instructional program are needed for success in the educational program." It may be concluded that children reared in poverty situations tend to grow up feeling alienated from the mainstream of home, school and community life.

Psychological Patterns. A profile of the typical alienated youth reveals a psychological pattern of defective relationships, mistrust of authority, limited behavior patterns, low frustration tolerance and low concept of self. (See Figure 2)

During the preschool years, notes Samuda, (1975) the predominantly negative self-image that the minority child develops is further consolidated by his experiences with the school, which makes little or no attempt to recognize his history, heritage and place in the world.

FIGURE 2 ALIENATED MINORITY YOUTH OFFENDERS IN TRANSITIONAL SETTINGS



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Intellectual Characteristics. The intellectual characteristics of this group include subnormal intellect, deficient cognitive functioning, inadequate perceptual scheme, deficient reasoning ability, and non-traditional cognitive styles. (See Figure 3)

It is apparent that youth offenders have various educational and psychological needs which must be met. In many instances, however, the public schools have been unable to meet the challenge of providing the necessary motivation and stimulation.

Cardenas and Zamora (1980) state:

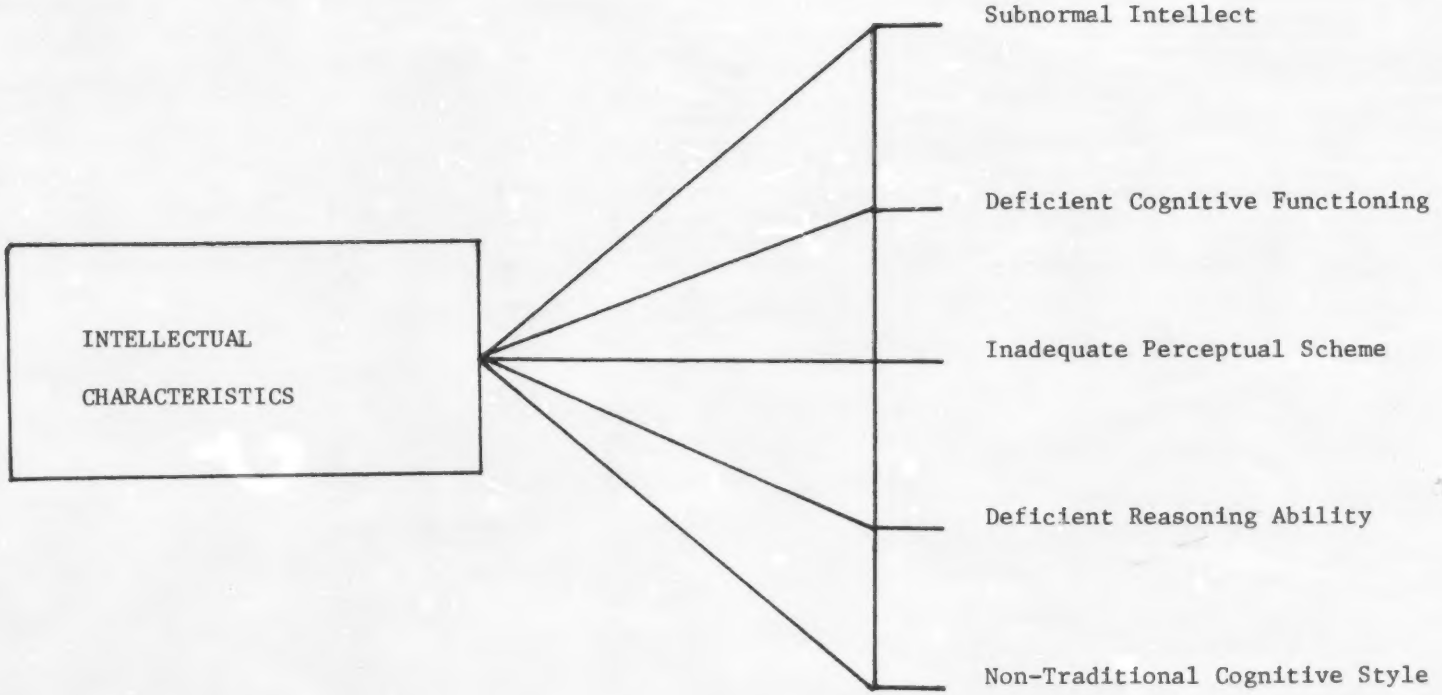
> "Poor children are educationally handicapped when they are placed in an educational program which fails to take into account the unique early development patterns and assumes and requires the same developmental level which is normally found in middle-class children."

The relative absence of radios, newspapers, magazines, T. V. sets and books are cited by Cardenas and Zamora (1980) as contributing factors in atypical developmental patterns of minority children. The unavailability of intellectually stimulating games, toys, and other educational activities and materials was cited as resulting in depressed intellectual development.

During the early years these children's learning deficiences may not have been obvious; but if undetected or untreated as they progress through school, usually result in social and emotional problems. The deficiences noted in auditory attention, interpretation skills, language usage, inadequate vocabulary, are delimiting characteristics which cause minority children to feel alienated from the larger educational and social structure (Black, 1966).

As a possible solution to the problem of alienated youth, the Children's Defense Fund recommends that schools seek to provide interesting

FIGURE 3 ALIENATED MINORITY YOUTH OFFENDERS IN TRANSITIONAL SETTINGS



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and flexible curricula and teaching approaches to meet the human variations among this group.

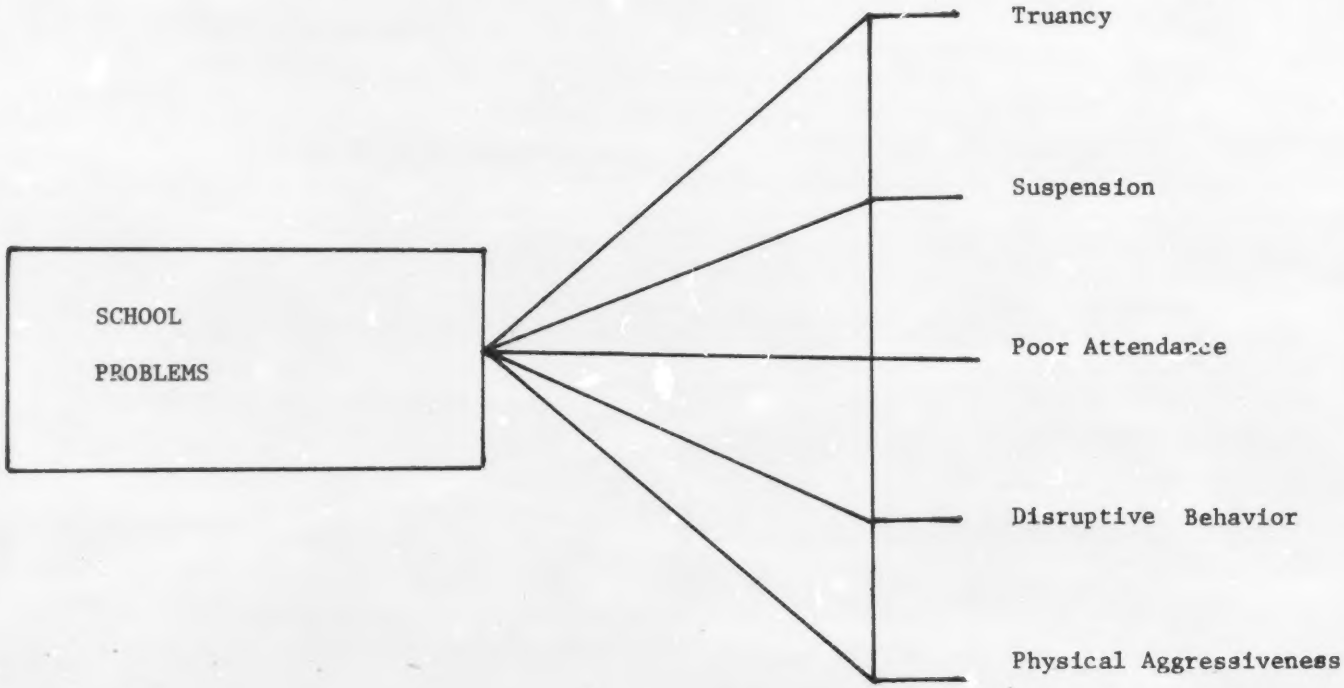
School Problems. Among the school problems that permeate the literature are truancy, suspension, poor attendance, disruptive behavior and physical aggressiveness. (See Figure 4)

It is well-documented that the traditional school programs failed to meet the educational needs of youth in transitional settings. Glasser (1978) cautions, however, that "blaming school problems on bad homes or bad communities is a sad rationalization that too many educators embrace."

In serving the alienated and disruptive, Meers (1980) proposes the development of a plan similar to the Individual Education Plan to help remove some of the uncertainty and confusion regarding role responsibilities. He cautions, however, that such an educational road map will help to create an educational picture for both student and staff but will not eliminate the source of alienation, nor totally erase disruption.

Johnson notes that education is an essential component in the system of "treatment" of alienated and disruptive youth. Special Education, correctional education, and alternative education programs assume a complementary role with mental health and social services in combining socialization experiences, direct education as well as opportunities to identify and pursue occupational and vocational objectives.

FIGURE 4 ALIENATED MINORITY YOUTH OFFENDERS IN TRANSITIONAL SETTINGS



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Focus on Prevention

Several programs have been organized to serve as an alternate to placing offenders in youth development centers. These vary from specialized programs established by grants to universities and agencies, to Community Based Alternatives sponsored by the Department of Human Resources.

Center for Early Adolescence. This center was established at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under a grant from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. According to Joan Lipsitz, center director, the primary efforts focus on responsive schooling for youth ten through fifteen years old, and on advocating the need for appropriate activities during after - school hours. Another goal is to serve as a clearinghouse for information regarding this age group and increase the effectiveness of agencies and professionals who work with young adolescents, as they experience a time of physical, social and emotional growth.

Concern for Children, Inc. This program is a short-term (30 days to 90 days) residential care for boys and girls in need of placement. The program provides short term structured respite residential care. The primary goal is to aid in the formulation of a plan to return to the family or seek alternative placement on a permanent basis. Referral sources include the court, community agencies (Department of Social Services) and self referrals under some conditions.

Edgement Community Center. This is a specialized school services program designed to develop and implement an effective approach for helping problem youth adjust and grow in a regular school setting. The measurable objectives are to reduce the incidence of school expulsions, suspensions and truancy among the targeted group of "at risk youth."

A second objective is to increase the academic level of functioning of these youth. Clients are referred from Durham City School System, Parents and the Juvenile Court Division.

Delinquency Diversion. The delinquency diversion counseling program aims to prevent delinquent behavior among status offenders, youths at risk, and secondarily adjudicated juvenile delinquents. This program seeks to reduce the number of negative reports on the clients from families, schools, and court counselors and to evaluate positive changes in behavioral characteristics. Referral sources include parents and relatives, school officials, police officers, court counselors, social and mental health agencies. The program effectiveness is measured by a client tracking form for community based alternative treatment and counseling programs.

Community Juvenile Justice Programs of the Community Guidance Clinic for Children/Youth. This community based program provides psychiatric screening and evaluation, inservice training, referral, treatment, coordination, program evaluation and day treatment The goal is to provide assistance to the juvenile court, youth police and other agencies in planning alternatives to placement in youth development centers by making maximal use of the client's psychological assets to select the least restrictive alternative available. The Juvenile Justice Team members include a child psychiatrist, clinical child psychologist and psychiatric social workers. Consultation evaluation and treatment services are provided by psychology interns, psychiatry residents, and graduate students in social work under the supervision of the clinic's staff. Careful documentation is maintained of all multidisciplinary interaction between the program and referral sources which include

juvenile counselors, youth police, Division of Social Services, Delinquency Division Counselors, and others in the community working with delinquents and predelinquent youth.

Project Telescope. This specialized home-school coordination program was designed to reduce the drop-out suspension rate of a target group of high-risk junior high students with a history of poor school adjustment, delinquent behavior, truancy, and/or undisciplined behavior. Clients are referred to the program by parents, court counselors, social workers, and school personnel. Intervention activities are concentrated in three major areas, education and encouragement of parental involvement in support of students' school adjustment; individual and peer group counseling with students to promote successful school adjustment; and implementation of management strategies within the school that will maximize chances for students' success.

Offender Aid and Restoration Program. Under the Offender Aid and Restoration Program, financed by public and private sources offenders are assigned to work for community - service agencies rather than receiving prison terms or fines. Upon satisfactory completion of their work, the charges against them are dismissed. This plan permits youthful offenders and those with no prior arrest records to avoid the stigma of a criminal record.

A State initiated program for "Status offenders," serves children who have done things that would go unpunished if done by adults. These include truancy, running away, curfew violations, smoking, drinking, even arguing. Unfortunately, status offenders must rely on the discretion of judges, and in many states are not entitled to counsel or protected from self-incrimination.

Recent information reveals that nineteen states have passed laws that separate status offenders from juvenile criminals under varying circumstances. As alternatives to institutionalization, juvenile courts rely on placing children with family, friends, older brothers.

Relevancy of Educational Programs

A major dilemma facing program planners is the relevance of educational materials and programs for students in transitional settings.

Wilde and Sommers (1978) agree that the focus must shift from eliminating to preventing behavior problems when teaching disruptive adolescents. Four suggestions are offered for formulating a consistent approach to a structured program. These are: 1) furnish students with a rationale for the subject matter to be presented; 2) build a positive classroom structure by informing the students of goals and objectives for them as individuals; 3) structure the classroom in such a way that students know they will, to some extent; choose their own goals; 4) give students some options in class discipline; allow them input in rule formation.

To implement the proposed suggestions it is necessary to plan activities which will expand the students knowledge of the content area and increase interest in the material being presented. To achieve desirable results the teacher can identify the strengths and weaknesses of each student and devise appropriate objectives and activities. Within a framework structured by the teacher, the students can be encouraged to make important decisions about classroom activities and concentrate on areas of personal interest. Some teachers may decide that it is unwise to present disruptive students with a choice about how they should behave.

There are indications, however, that students who are actively involved in deciding what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior as well as the consequences of each violation, learn to consider the consequences of their own behavior.

Role of the Teacher

Teachers in transitional settings must help these youth to realistically seek alternatives which will enable them to become contributing members upon their return to the larger society. Positive peer group pressure, social modeling and a variety of other techniques have proved successful strategies for modifying behavior.

Kohler (1981) states, "teachers involved in youth participation must create an environment of trust in which young people are not afraid to exert themeselves, to take chances, and even to fail."

Teachers are seeking to expand their knowledge of factors that might be impeding the progress of youth in transitional settings. This concern appears not to be the result of pressure exerted by administrators, but seems to emanate from the awareness of the teachers themselves who generally expend an enormous amount of energy but are achieving meager results.

OPINION SURVEY DATA

To obtain a clear perspective on the problems of alienated youth a survey was administered to assess the opinions of 165 preservice and inservice teachers, supervisors and other personnel employed in public schools and facilities serving these youths. Items for the specially designed survey were drawn from published research, interviews with teachers and other professionals. The results are reported in Table 1.

TABLE I

OPINIONS RELATED TO ALIENATED MINORITY YOUTH

	Inservice Teachers	Preservice Teachers	Supervisor	Other	Total
1. Do you think that students feel alienated from the school because of unmet education and social needs?	(N=70)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=28)	(N=165)
YES	77%	74%	83%	71%	75%
NO	12%	18%		11%	14%
UNCERTAIN	10%	8%	17%	18%	11%
2. Do you regard the "school climate" approach as a feasible means of alleviating behavior problems?	(N=73)	(N=56)	(N=6)	(N=27)	(N=162)
YES	47%	30%	33%	63%	43%
NO	25%	41%	50%	11%	29%
UNCERTAIN	28%	29%	17%	26%	28%
3. Do you feel that it is justifiable to expel or suspend a first offense student from school?	(N=73)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=27)	(N=167)
YES	11%	10%	17%	15%	11%
NO	70%	79%	33%	59%	70%
UNCERTAIN	19%	11%	50%	26%	19%

TABLE I Continued

	Inservice Teachers	Preservice Teachers	Supervisor	Other	Total
4. Do you feel that public disclosure of vandalistic behavior increases the probability that this type of behavior will increase?	(N=72)	(N=60)	(N=6)	(N=28)	(N=166)
YES	34%	52%	50%	29%	40%
NO	42%	28%	50%	32%	36%
UNCERTAIN	24%	20%		39%	24%
5. Do you feel that if a stern stance is taken on small infractions of rules that the larger problems will be eliminated?	(N=73)	(N=60)	(N=6)	(N=28)	(N=167)
YES	60%	45%	66%	64%	56%
NO	26%	35%	17%	18%	27%
UNCERTAIN	14%	20%	17%	18%	17%
6. Do you feel that first offense norm violators should receive the same punishment as repeaters?	(N=73)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=28)	(N=168)
YES	4%	3%			3%
NO	85%	92%	100%	96%	90%
UNCERTAIN	11%	5%		4%	7%

TABLE I Continued

	Inservice Teachers	Preservice Teachers	Supervisor	Other	Total
7. Do you feel that schools should forbid disclosure of specific information pertaining to a particular incident?	(N=72)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=26)	(N=165)
YES	46%	30%	67%	50%	41%
NO	33%	51%		35%	39%
UNCERTAIN	21%	20%	33%	15%	20%
8. Do you feel that an effective educational and social program will maximize the likelihood that minority youth will become useful and productive citizens?	(N=73)	(N=60)	(N=5)	(N=27)	(N=165)
YES	88%	88%	80%	85%	87%
NO	7%	7%		11%	8%
UNCERTAIN	5%	5%	20%	4%	5%
9. Do you feel that because of past experiences, black children have a high need for self-assertion and aggression?	(N=72)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=26)	(N=165)
YES	67%	61%	66%	69%	65%
NO	21%	19.5%	17%	23%	21%
UNCERTAIN	12%	19.5%	17%	8%	14%

TABLE I Continued

	Inservice Teachers	Preservice Teachers	Supervisor	Other	Total
10. Do you believe that the sense of control and level of achievement of black students is increased by being in the presence of white students?	(N=73)	(N=61)	(N=6)	(N=27)	(N=167)
YES	19%	24%	17%	26%	22%
NO	58%	57%	83%	52%	57%
UNCERTAIN	23%	19%		22%	21%

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Results and Discussion

An examination of the data revealed that 75 percent of the respondents indicated that students feel alienated from the school because of unmet education and social needs. This finding has strong implications for teachers and other personnel concerned with planning programs for alienated youth.

Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that it is not justifiable to expel or suspend a first offense student from school. When questioned as to whether a stern stance on small infractions of rules would eliminate the larger problems, 56 percent of the respondents replied in the affirmative.

A significant 90 percent of the respondents indicated that first offense norm violators should not receive the same punishment as repeaters.

The responses of those surveyed revealed that only 41 percent believed that schools should forbid disclosure of specific information pertaining to a particular incident.

Eighty-seven percent of the respondents agreed that an effective educational and social program will maximize the likelihood that minority youth will become useful and productive citizens.

An inspection of the data revealed that respondents in all categories were in general agreement, (65 percent for total group) that because of past experiences, black children have a high need for self-assertion and aggression.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that the sense of control and level of achievement of black students was not increased by being in the presence of white students.

The results from the study indicated that all groups surveyed held similar views regarding the problems and issues concerning alienated youth.

SUMMARY

This study was designed to focus attention on alienated minority youth. Implications were drawn from published research, observations, a survey of opinions related to problems and issues of alienation, and from practical experiences as an educational consultant in a youth development center.

The increased awareness by educators and other professionals of the need for early identification of potential problems and the need to focus on prevention has resulted in greater communication between public school teachers and personnel in transitional settings. This cooperation is especially desirable since a large number of respondents to the survey indicated that students feel alienated from the school because of unmet education and social needs.

The major techniques employed in these settings should focus on changing the youth's attitude toward school, improving the self image, developing interpersonal skills, and relating to adults and authority figures.

Attitudinal changes, self concept enhancement, and improved behavior are often initiated and reinforced by successful educational experiences. Thus, an innovative, multidisciplinary approach is suggested with the Individual Education Plan serving as the basis for the program plan.

Many of the alienated minority youths were reared in low income homes. The detrimental effects of environmental defeciences is well-documented in the literature. These deficits are compounded by school suspensions, expulsions, poor achievement and other exclusionary measures. In planning an educational program, the primary focus should center on parent involvement, trust building activities, recreational activities to serve as a positive mode for aggressive and disruptive behavior, planned peer interaction to emphasize desirable social skills, and adequate role models to serve as mentors for these youths.

Respondents completing the survey indicated a strong opposition to requiring the same punishment for first offense norm violators as the repeaters, and expelling or suspending first offenders from school. This finding is consistent with the philosophy of the status offender program.

This study has special implications for teachers and other personnel since specific competencies are required to meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of this group. Overall attention centers on the reintegration of these youths in the public schools and community life.

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